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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [SW](#) [SZ](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIAN REPRESENTATION IN MOSCOW

REF: A. TBLISI 451  
[1](#)B. 08 MOSCOW 2990

Classified By: Pol M/C Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Georgian Charge d'Affaires Givi Shugarov told us March 13 that the new Georgian interest section in the Swiss embassy opened March 5 was running smoothly (see also ref A.) Echoing DFM Karasin's March 6 statement in Izvestia that the GOR hoped the interest sections in Moscow and Tbilisi would be "an entirely temporary phenomenon" and that relations would soon return to "the state of good-neighborliness traditional and natural for our peoples," MFA Fourth CIS Department Director Andrey Kelin, who attended the event, added that opening the interest sections was "the maximum of what we can do at the moment to protect the people's interests."

[1](#)2. (C) Shugarov said the interest section enjoyed regular contact with the MFA, but in practice did not have access to Duma members or other branches of government. DFM Karasin told Shugarov in a private meeting that Russia sought direct contact with Georgia "without middlemen." Noting both PM Putin and President Medvedev's insistence that there would be no direct contacts with Saakashvili, Shugarov said he was focused on promoting rapprochement through the Russian Orthodox Church and, ultimately, through parliamentary contacts that could be less structured or high-profile than government-to-government meetings. Shugarov explained that the Swiss proved more willing to play a hands-off role in sponsoring the Georgian interest section, with Swiss diplomats readily conceding to us that they lacked the breadth of contacts and long professional associations enjoyed by Georgian diplomats with their MFA counterparts. In return, Switzerland had asked the GOG to maintain full transparency in its operations in the section.

[1](#)3. (C) Relating Russian DFM Karasin's quip that Georgia initially did not want to go with Switzerland because it was "too neutral," Shugarov added that during the three-month negotiations with Sweden on running the interest section (see also ref B), Sweden had repeatedly increased its demands. First it had requested that a Swedish officer be stationed in the Georgian interest section, and then asked that his Western-European-level salary -- higher than Shugarov's own -- be paid for out of the Georgian embassy's tight budget. This had helped tip the scale toward Switzerland.

[1](#)4. (C) Shugarov confirmed that even before the opening of the interest section, Georgia had offered Russian citizens the same visa services as before the outbreak of the armed conflict, meaning that visas to Georgia could be obtained at the embassy, at the airport, or at the border to Georgia. The March 5 opening of the interest section had not produced a spike in visa applications, but Shugarov side-stepped questions on the volume of travel now seen between Georgia and Russia.  
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